

Daniele COGONI – Anca Mariana NECHITA, *La visione ecumenica di Padre Dumitru Stăniloae. Aspetti esistenziali, teologice ed ecclesiastici. Viziunea ecumenică a Părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae. Aspecte existențiale, teologice și ecleziiale*, Prefazione/Prefață: Prof. Univ. Dr. Cristinel Ioja, Cittadella Editrice, Assisi, 2024, 355 pp.

The book of Daniele Cogoni and Anca Mariana Nechita is a special work, because it is a bilingual, Italian-Romanian edition, the result of the work of two authors, one Italian and the other Romanian, published in special graphic conditions, at a prestigious publishing house in Italy: Cittadella Publisher from Assisi and enjoying the enlightening foreword of Father university professor Dr. Cristinel Ioja, Dean of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology “Iarion V. Felea” in Arad. The book, dedicated to Father Dumitru Stăniloae, the greatest Romanian Orthodox theologian of all time, has a very exciting title because it refers to “The Ecumenical Vision of Father Dumitru Stăniloae. Existential, theological and ecclesial aspects”, it is known that the great Orthodox theologians of the last century had different views on ecumenism.

In the first part of the book we have the Italian version of the text (pp. 19-193), and in the second part the Romanian version (pp. 193-351), the work ending with the indication of the essential bibliography, in which we have indicated texts by Father Dumitru Stăniloae in Romanian, translations of his texts in French and Italian, as well as references to some studies.

In the foreword, Rev. Prof. Univ. Dr. Cristinel Ioja, with the expertise of the theologian specialized in Dogmatic Theology, a discipline so brilliantly represented by Father D. Stăniloae, shows that in the last century “Orthodox Dogmatics benefited from the renewing vision of Father Dumitru Stăniloae, exponent of the neopatristic synthesis” (p.

9). However, despite the depth and vast area of coverage, his work did not enjoy a suitable reception in Western Theology, due to the historical context in which he lived, the isolation of Romania during those years of communist dictatorship, but also due to the fact that a large part of it has not yet been translated into the languages of circulation. “Or, knowing the theological thinking of father Dumitru Stăniloae means an enrichment...” (p. 19) for Western Theology. However, Father D. Stăniloae’s participation in the Ecumenical Movement allowed him direct contact with the diversity of Western Theology, as well as an understanding of Christianity in what it had specifically in modernity. So, not only the exchange of ideas was mutual, but also the enrichments are mutual between Eastern and Western theologians. In addition to all the innovative contributions he brought to the understanding of dogma in the 20th century, the present book insists on the theological contribution of Father D. Stăniloae to “the dynamics of ecumenical dialogue through extensive studies in which, from within the Church’s Tradition, he proposed concepts and dialogue solutions, always preserving the principle of the primacy of the Church’s faith in view of Christian unity” (p. 11). Father Dean also emphasizes the importance of the existential and ecclesial inner springs that shaped Father D. Stăniloae’s ecumenical thought, one open to dialogue, as the authors of the book show, even if it was also critical at times.

The first part of the book entitled: *Historical context and biographical and bibliographical aspects*, compiled by Mrs. Anca Mariana Nechita, has a very well-documented introduction, which shows the genesis of Father D. Stăniloae’s thought, who wanted a reconciliation of Western rationality with the Christian Orthodox faith of the East for the realization of a cultural and theological synthesis (p. 193). Thus, father Stăniloae managed to achieve an ecumenical openness, which deserves to be deepened more by the Western theological environment. Even when he is critical of the positions of Western theology, Father Stăniloae does not betray a closed mentality, prejudices or an inferiority complex, nor even an arrogant attitude, but the desire to provoke a constructive attitude, of weighing each theological position through reference to Church Tradition. The author mentions some of the Romanian and foreign theologians who dealt with the life and theology of father D. Stăniloae, creating a true history of

research, a *status quaestionis*, necessary for any research. The conclusion he reaches in this introductory section of the work is that Father Stăniloae was a “man of life”, of “living theology”, making himself the “experience of the Holy Spirit”, while his theology was “a continuous friendly dialogue with God and the neighbor” (pp. 195-196).

The first chapter dedicated to the historical context (pp. 201-217) in which father D. Stăniloae was formed and lived, traces the more general framework of Romania in the troubled 20th century, with the establishment of the Romanian Patriarchate (1925) and the situation of the Romanian Orthodox Church from the interwar period (1914-1945), but also from the period after the establishment of the communist regime, that of the Cold War (1946-1991). The last subchapter traces the three phases through which Father Stăniloae’s existence passed: 1. The period in Sibiu between the years 1929-1946, characterized by the beginning of his family and priestly vocation, but also by his service at the chair at the “Andreian” Theological Academy (1936-1945); 2. The period spent in Bucharest, before imprisonment (1947-1958) and after prison (1958-1989), when the need for survival was predominant, after the prison experience; 3. The period after the fall of the communist regime (1989-1993), when his reflections on anti-ecumenical attitude are susceptible to serious reservations, as stated by Anca Mariana Nechita (pp. 212-213). This is because many interviews are taken out of context, others may be suspected of being fake, due to poor recording quality, etc.

The second chapter presents, in more detail, the life and work of Dumitru Stăniloae, starting with the stage of his childhood, studies at the confessional school in his native village, Vlădeni, with which he will keep a special connection throughout his life, with the family from which he came, the “simple, modest, humble” faith learned at home (p. 220), the period of studies at the “Andrei Şaguna” confessional high school in Braşov, then at the Faculty of Theology in Cernăuți (1922-1927) and a year at the Literature in Bucharest (1923-1924). Sensing his intellectual capabilities, Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan will send him to study in Greece in Athens (1927-1928), in Munich (1928-1929) and Berlin (summer of 1929), but also in Paris (pp. 220-223). The following sub-chapters will present the life of father Stăniloae and his cultural commitment from the

adult period, as a professor at the Department of Fundamental Theology of the “Andrei Țaguna” Theological Academy in Sibiu, but also as editor and director of “Telegraful Român”, his marriage to Maria Mișu, the birth of his children and family life “simple, harmonious, marked by loving relationships and intense prayer” (p. 224). The author continues to insist on the life and teaching experience of father D. Stăniloae in the two periods: before imprisonment, insisting also on the experience of the Burning Bush, the prison experience, but also the teaching period after prison, each with its own specifics. The second chapter ends with the resumption of the work of translating the Philokalia, a translation begun in the Sibiu period (pp. 238-243).

The third part, of the final considerations, summarizes the conclusions reached by the author vis-à-vis the work of father D. Stăniloae, which would represent a modern reinterpretation of patristic theology, “the natural expression of a «confessor», who situates in the continuity of the patristic and neopatristic spirit, the expression of an «enlightened one» who puts in writing the secret of his relationship with the Spirit of God” (p. 245).

And Professor Daniele Cogoni notes, in the introduction, that unfortunately, due to unfortunate historical circumstances, the theology of Father D. Stăniloae is not known in the West compared to the theology of other Orthodox theologians. Even if the work *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* was translated into some languages of circulation, it is far too little for the thorough knowledge of the Romanian theologian and he exemplifies the translations into Italian (p. 247) and also indicates the reasons for this ignorance and non-translation of his work. By trying to recover, even a little, from the interpretation of the work of the Romanian theologian, D. Cogoni explains his approach in this book (p. 248). He shows that Stăniloae’s thinking is based on “a much wider cultural world (than the Romanian one, n.n.), that there is a much richer multi-confessional and inter-confessional theological horizon, with the understanding that he is and remains, in this horizon, a Romanian Orthodox theologian” (p. 248).

Daniele Cogoni then presents father Dumitru Stăniloae and his connection with the young hieromonk Dumitru Veștemean, the two being promoters of Romanian ecumenism, moreover, father Stăniloae owes a lot to the other, who seems to have influenced him in certain aspects. Little was known about D. Veștemean, even by Romanian theologians, but the

Italian author outlines his profile, removing him from oblivion and making an act of moral reparation. Therefore, D. Cogoni reaches the following conclusion:

“it cannot be denied that the «great theologian of Romania» in the genesis of his thought, certainly irenic and ecumenical, was nourished without any doubt (and also nourished the theological thinking of the time), drawing inspiration from the important reflections of his friend Veștemean, who, like him, proved to be fully orthodox and ecumenical, without ever falling into any form of theological or political extremism” (pp. 254-255).

Father Stăniloae’s desire, since the beginning of his activity, was to reinterpret the dogmas of the faith, to give birth to a living, existential theology that would stop the rationalistic drift in which academic theology was at the beginning of the 20th century, as he could – found it at the Faculty of Theology in Cernăuți (pp. 265-266). The existential theology that D. Stăniloae wanted was a “theology capable of leading believers to a living experience of communion with God”, one closer to the primary Church of the Holy Fathers, which placed the Person of Jesus Christ at the center (p. 266). From here Father Stăniloae reaches the dynamic fidelity to the Tradition of the Church, to the Holy Fathers to which he will constantly resort, but not as a fossilized deposit, but as an eternally living spring, stirred by the Holy Spirit (pp. 276-286).

D. Cogoni shows that for Father Stăniloae, theology is inseparable from anthropology, because God, revealing Himself, does not reveal Himself to Himself, but to man and for man, so that man, knowing God, knows himself. Therefore, what is said about man cannot be separated from what is said about God. Even more, God reveals himself through Man: “Jesus Christ the Theanthropus, one of the Trinity, who chose to become one of us” (p. 287). From here also comes the possibility of communion with Jesus Christ, of communion between man and God, because emphasizing “the centrality of the mystery of the incarnation, one can understand why the theological and communion path preferred by Stăniloae is the one that leads from the human to the divine, from the experience of human communion to the experience of divine communion” (p. 289). That is why

personal growth towards communion is nourished by the encounter with the other.

For father D. Stăniloae, “his existential theology coincided with a theology of ecclesial experience” (p. 293), in which the tendency towards an authentic inter-human communion leads to holiness. This explains why “for Stăniloae, whoever practices the art of theology cannot but combine the theological discourse with the discourse on the ecclesial vocation to holiness” (p. 294). That is why the Church must speak both about interhuman communion in the image of the Holy Trinity, and about those who make this communion visible, in particular, that is, the saints (pp. 294-295). Holiness appears as intensity of the relationship, it is the love for the other taken to the extreme, the Church being in this sense “sign, instrument and eschatological anticipation” (p. 295), and for father Stăniloae holiness is the very goal of life, but also of existential theology.

The ecumenical openness that Father Stăniloae showed since his youth also promoted it later through his writings, in which he spoke about welcoming those of other faiths to Orthodoxy, by welcoming Anglican or Catholic delegations to Sibiu, by the friendship that bound him to the great evangelical theologian Jurgen Moltmann or to Cardinal Tomáš Špidlík, but especially through the experience of prison, where confessional differences disappeared in the face of the suffering endured for Christ (pp. 304-312).

The author names a subchapter *the Munich experience*, showing that Father Stăniloae developed an ecumenism of unity in diversity, that he was sensitized by his 1978 ecumenical experience from the München meeting, where he will argue that the other Churches are “incomplete, some closer to completeness, others more distant”, but it does not deny their character of ecclesiality, and that they were formed in a certain connection with the complete Church (p. 326). Thus, he recognizes the existence of a certain ecclesiality outside the canonical boundaries of the Orthodox Church and shows his relational availability towards all other Christian confessions, valuing the identity and richness of the other, which makes him affirm that Orthodoxy and Catholicism are not separated by substantial differences (p. 331).

The work could not end without analyzing the concept of “open sobornicity” put into circulation by father D. Stăniloae, as an expression of his ecumenical openness and the valorization of the other. For the

Romanian theologian, there can only be “Churches in communion” or “communion between Churches”, which can only be achieved through “open sobornicity”. According to him, “sobornicity is the perfect Christian unity in the confession and living by all Christians in communion of the apostolic heritage; so that it can be said that the one Church that ecumenism must aim to achieve is the apostolic and sobornic Church” (p. 339). According to Stăniloae, open sobornicity is an ecclesiological vision that places the limits of the Church beyond its canonical borders.

The present work is intended to be a tribute to the thinking of the Romanian theologian, a “modest attempt to highlight the theological genius of Father Dumitru Stăniloae”, his ecumenical commitment and the contributions he made within the ecumenical movement, as a balanced theologian, anchored in patristic thinking, in the spirit of the Fathers from the East and the West and open to dialogue with those of other religious traditions.

Rev. Dr. Caius Claudius CUȚARU

Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Athosul și duhovnicii pe care i-am cunoscut. Însemnări 1974-2015 (Mount Athos and the Confessors I Met. Notebooks 1974-2015)*, translation by Marinela Bojin, Sophia Publishing House, Bucharest, 2023, 245 pp.

The work published at the prestigious *Sophia* Publishing House, in 2023, is a translation of the original published at Editions des Syrtes, Geneve, Switzerland, 2022 under the name *Mont Athos, Carnets 1974-2015*. The author Jean Claude Larchet (b. 1949) is one of the best-known Orthodox theologians and patrologists, of French origin, with a consistent work in the field, translated into 17 languages. He was born into a French Roman Catholic family, immediately after the end of the Second World War, and at the age of 22, he met the Orthodox Archimandrite Serge Chévitch, who would change his entire life, by converting to the Orthodox Church in